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LA VÉRENDRYE

By

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PRICE 10 CENTS

THE RYERSON PRESS
TORONTO

THE RYERSON CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

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A LITTLE more than three hundred years ago, Samuel de Champlain with a company of thirty men built on the rock of Quebec a group of three two-storied log buildings, each twelve feet by fifteen, and a store-house thirty-six feet by eighteen. This little band of colonists, three thousand miles from home, was left almost wholly to its own resources. Its members suffered incredible hardships from the piercing cold, from hunger, from disease, from never-ceasing toil. Yet, fired and sustained by the example and faith of their leader, they struggled on, and with magnificent endurance grimly held their ground in the hope that some day things would be better.

Champlain and his men could not foresee the future. They could have no vision of a mighty Dominion stretching from ocean to ocean. They could not imagine that their half-starved, ragged group would be the pioneers of a population of nine millions, linked together by railways, steamships, telegraphs and wireless, by common interests, common standards of life, and common aims. They could not know that Canada,

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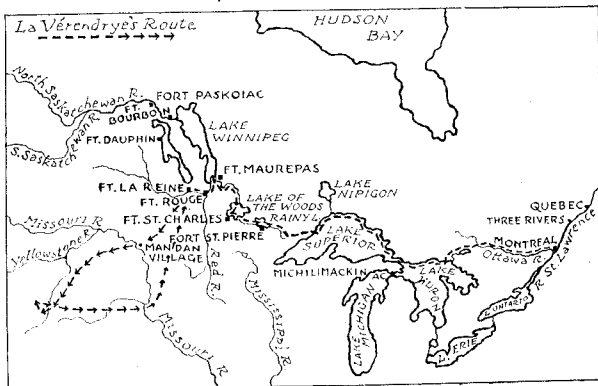
originally an Indian name for a village, would become the name of a nation with an assured position among the great nations of the world.

But we as Canadian citizens, who have seen these things come to pass, must always remember that the Canada of to-day owes its existence to Champlain and his band of followers, and to many another Canadian who has placed love of country and an unquenchable thirst for knowledge before all else in life. We know that our country has made progress at a marvellous rate; we must not forget that she has done so because many of her sons have made sacrifices for her in a marvellous degree. Let us, then, readily acknowledge our debt to these men and try to bring into our own lives something of that love of country which they themselves felt so strongly.

Of the men who carried on the pioneer work so nobly begun by Champlain, none deserves a higher place than Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de la Vérendrye.

La Vérendrye was born in 1685. Although by this time almost eighty years had passed since the foundation of Quebec, the French colony in Canada was still in a very

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MAP OF THE EXPLORATIONS OF LA VÉRENDRYE AND HIS SONS.
 AN INSCRIBED TABLET WAS DISCOVERED ON THE BANK OF THE
 MISSOURI, AT PIERRE, SOUTH DAKOTA, AT THE SPOT SHOWN ON
 THE MAP WHERE LA VÉRENDRYE'S ROUTE CROSSES THE RIVER
 ON THE RETURN JOURNEY.

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distracted condition. Population had increased slowly, since only Roman Catholics were allowed to enter the colony. But French Roman Catholics were for the most part unwilling to leave France, which was the dominant power in Europe in the seventeenth century. The energetic young Frenchman of the day could find a career in the armies of the motherland, with plenty of fighting under splendid leaders, and with excellent chances of promotion. Neither garrison duty at Quebec or Montreal, nor life on a Canadian seigniory, could offer attractions in any way comparable to those of a campaign on the Rhine or in Flanders. So the colony languished. True, for a period of ten years following the taking over of Canada by the French Government as a Crown Colony in 1663, there was considerable activity. Louis XIV, desiring to make Canada a colony worthy of the great nation from which she sprang, sent soldiers and settlers in generous numbers. But this activity was short-lived, and in 1685 the total population was still only about six thousand. A large proportion of these lived in the settlements at Quebec, Montreal and Three Rivers. The rest cultivated their lit-

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tle farms, each with its strip of river-frontage along the banks of the St. Lawrence or Richelieu. Life was very unsafe in the colony. Scarcely any farm was beyond the reach of Iroquois raiding parties. The three main settlements had defences that the Iroquois could not overcome, but there was always a risk in venturing outside their walls. Although there was little money in the colony, and although the garrisons had to be supplied with provisions from France, most of the colonists had enough to eat. The *habitants*, as the farmers were called, were in most cases able to raise sufficient supplies of food for their needs. The women made clothes for the family. Thus by dint of unremitting toil the *habitant* managed to keep fed and clothed. Some of the women were fortunate enough to be educated at the convent schools of Quebec or Montreal. The men were mostly uneducated. The principal link with the outer world was the Curé, an ever-welcome figure, who often braved the direst hardships in carrying out his duty to his widely-scattered flock. On the farms, the years brought little change. Son succeeded father, or shared his father's land with his brothers, each share containing a

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strip of all-important river-frontage, often only a few yards in width. The restless spirits, who tired of the monotony and toil of pioneer cultivation, wandered west. As *coureurs-de-bois*, they entered the fur-trade sought out the Indians in their villages, and often adopted the customs and morals of their hosts.

La Vérendrye spent his boyhood at Three Rivers, then a palisaded settlement enclosing twenty-five houses, the third largest in the colony. His father, an officer in the famous Carignan regiment which came to Canada with the Marquis de Tracy in 1665, married the heiress of Varennes, and afterwards became governor of Three Rivers. The explorer, known to us as La Vérendrye, was one of his nine children. The governor's official salary was very small, only 1,200 francs a year, and though he owned three fiefs with some seventy persons as his vassals, he must have found it difficult to provide for his large family. The rent paid by the *habitants* (his vassals), would be of no great value, a sack of wheat, some eggs, a few live fowl, a little money. Doubtless he cultivated a good deal of land himself, but the labour involved in clearing the

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ground, and poor methods of cultivation would be a sure bar to riches from this source. Like many another seignior, the governor traded in furs on his own account, and by virtue of his position made considerable profits, for Three Rivers was a favourite resort for the Western Indians. Its connection with the West was of long standing. It was the home-town of Nicolet, the first Frenchman to explore Lake Michigan. It was later the home of Radisson, the discoverer of the Mississippi. It lay well away from the customary haunts of the Iroquois, and consequently attracted more than its share of trade as being nearer to the West than Quebec and safer than Montreal. The young La Vérendrye was thus familiar with the fur-trade and with the Indians of the West from early boyhood. He was probably educated in Quebec and, being the son of the governor of Three Rivers, was well known to the Governor of the colony.

The hardships and dangers of pioneer life brought youths to manhood at an early age, and at eighteen La Vérendrye saw his first active service as a member of a band of Canadians and Indians sent in 1704 to attack the New England border settlement

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of Deerfield. After a terribly arduous tramp in mid-winter, the attacking force reached its objective, surrounded the houses of the sleeping inhabitants, and, at the signal, began its horrible work. Fifty men, women and children awoke from sleep only to lose their lives by musket-shot or tomahawk. Scalping knives reaped a plentiful harvest. One hundred prisoners were secured. All of them, men and women alike, were forced to accompany their captors to Canada. Fear of being caught by pursuers compelled the aggressors to return at top speed, and many of the women prisoners were tomahawked because they could not keep up. Few of the prisoners ever returned to the English colonies. It seems that on these expeditions, for there were many of them, the French were unwilling to curb the savagery of the Indians for fear of losing their support. The English colonists tended to follow the example of their enemies, and the struggle along the border was conducted according to the standards of beasts rather than of men. To the people of that day this state of affairs did not appear as shameful as it does to us, and

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we find that La Vérendrye took part in later raids.

In the early years of the eighteenth century Louis XIV was trying to put himself in a position where he could control the affairs of Europe. His plan was to join Spain with France. This plan was opposed by England, Holland and Austria. A mighty struggle, known as the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-13) took place. The great military reputation of France received severe setbacks at the hard-fought battles of Blenheim, Oudenarde and Ramillies. Louis XIV made desperate efforts to recover from his losses and keep his armies up to strength. The garrison of Canada was reduced and numbers of young Canadians were prevailed upon to cross to France and take service. Among them went La Vérendrye, who took part in the fierce struggle at Malplaquet, where the French, although defeated, inflicted heavier losses on their opponents than they themselves suffered. The future explorer was wounded nine times and left for dead on the field. He recovered, and received a commission as Lieutenant in recognition of his bravery. Unable through

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poverty to take this rank, he resigned and returned to Canada with the rank of Ensign.

Shortly after his return, he married, and with the permission of the governor of the colony set up as a furtrader at his father's fief of La Gabelle, near Three Rivers. The years that followed were the most peaceful and happy in the explorer's life. During this period were born his four sons, Jean-Baptiste, Pierre, François, and Louis-Joseph. The quality of the training that they received from their father shows itself in the high-minded devotion with which they, one and all, shared his hopes, hardships, fears, disappointments and poverty in the years that were to come. La Gabelle was an outpost settlement, so the young boys grew up strong and hardy, skilled canoe-and-axe-men, experts in frontier life, and admirably fitted to support their father in his explorations. There was little scope for La Vérendrye's energy at La Gabelle. Influenced by the growing needs of his family and by his desire to test the information that he had obtained over a period of many years from Western Indians, he secured (1727) from the Governor of the colony a grant of the trading post at Lake Nipigon, a lake of

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considerable size, north of Lake Superior. This post had been built with the idea of attracting those Indians who were in the habit of taking their furs to the English posts on Hudson's Bay. It soon became clear to La Vérendrye that if this were to be done effectively it would be necessary to establish trading centres still further west. He began, therefore, to collect and record all the information that he could obtain as to the land west of the Great Lakes.

By this time the Great Lakes were known thoroughly to the French. The idea that there was a great Western Sea at no great distance west of the Lakes was still commonly held, and plans for its discovery had been carefully discussed by both the Governor of Quebec and the French Government. The most serious obstacle to the progress of western exploration was the inveterate hostility of Assiniboines and Sioux. The French were very anxious to put an end to the constant warfare between these two tribes, and with this end in view founded Fort Beauharnois (named after the governor) at Pepin on the Mississippi in the Sioux country (1727). Unfortunately the officers in charge failed to win the confidence of the

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Indians. Ten years later the fort was abandoned, and La Vérendrye had grave cause to regret the failure of this attempt to clear the way for western exploration.

When La Vérendrye went to Nipigon there was already in existence a fort on the Kaministiquia River (founded in 1717 by de la Noue). Explorers had also penetrated from this point to Rainy Lake and the Lake of the Woods, while the existence and situation of Lake Winnipeg was known from reports of Indians. Strife between Crees and Sioux had, however, prevented the French from trading beyond Kaministiquia.

Three years at Nipigon strengthened La Vérendrye's impression that the really valuable fur trade could only be captured further west. He had also a genuine passion for exploration. He was no mere fur-trader, searching only for big profits. His whole life proves that gain was a secondary consideration with him. A methodical man, he kept careful record of all that he could learn of the unexplored west, and throughout his journals there shine clearly his love of country and his eagerness in the search for the Western Sea. He proved himself time and again ready to sacrifice everything in order

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that the work of exploration, of adding new lands to the French dominions in Canada, of reaching the far-famed Western Sea, might go on.

By 1730 La Vérendrye had decided to undertake the exploration of the West. He hoped that the French government would provide him with the men and supplies necessary for the work. But Louis XV spent so much money on his pleasures, and his ministers were so taken up with European affairs, that the importance of La Vérendrye's proposal was not recognized. He was told that the King would grant him a monopoly of the Western fur trade, and that the profits of this monopoly would easily cover his expenses. La Vérendrye remonstrated, but, failing to obtain better terms, was compelled to be content with the grant of a monopoly, and to attempt to finance the exploration himself. His own resources were scanty. He had therefore to bargain with a group of Montreal merchants, his "Associates," for supplies, equipment and wages for his men. The Montreal merchants proved hard taskmasters. They were not at all interested in exploration. Their sole concern was the establishment of

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forts at points where vast profits could be won from the fur trade. They sent their representatives along with La Vérendrye, controlled his movements as far as they could, and did all they could to force him to attend solely to the fur trading side. In 1731 La Vérendrye left Montreal with about fifty men, including his three sons and his nephew, La Jemmeraye. He followed the usual route to the west: up the Ottawa River to its junction with the Mattawa; up the Mattawa, thence to Lake Nipissing; across the Lake and down French River to Georgian Bay. Thence, skirting the northern shore of Lake Huron, he came to Michillimackinac, where he was joined by a priest, Father Mesaiger, a member of the Jesuit order. Late in August the party reached the mouth of the Pigeon River, which afforded easier access to Rainy Lake than did the Kaministiquia route followed by de la Noue. La Vérendrye's plans for pushing forward immediately to Rainy Lake had to be abandoned at this stage. His men, either through fear of hardship or because they had been tampered with by rival Montreal fur traders, mutinied and refused to go any further. There was little that La Vérendrye could do

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in the face of such a difficulty. La Salle, the explorer of the Mississippi Valley would probably have shot down a few of the ring-leaders (or have been shot down by them). La Vérendrye tried gentler methods, eventually with success. He was able to send his nephew ahead with a party of the best-disposed men before the freeze-up to establish a fort at Rainy Lake. He himself wintered at the mouth of the Kaministiquia with the malcontents. La Jemmeraye's expedition proved a great success. He built a fort at the point where the waters of Rainy Lake flow into Rainy River (about two miles east of the modern Fort Francis), and named it St. Pierre in honour of his uncle. Here he spend the winter trading. In May he set out down the Pigeon River with a valuable cargo of furs, and met La Vérendrye at the mouth of the river. This spot, known as Grand Portage, became, in the British period, the Western headquarters of the North-West fur-trading company of Montreal, and the scene of famous revels when the fur traders gathered there in the spring of each year.

The sight of La Jemmeraye's furs cheered both La Vérendrye and his men. To the

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leader the furs represented security for further advances from the merchants to meet the terribly heavy costs of the expedition. To the men the furs stood for wages, and were an incentive to further effort. After sending off the furs to Montreal, La Vérendrye, with all his remaining men, set out for Fort St. Pierre. Here he was well received by the Indians of the district, and, after the usual ceremonies and gifts, continued his voyage down Rainy River into the Lake of the Woods with an escort of natives in fifty canoes. He made for the north-west angle of the lake, and there built a second fort, which he named Fort Charles, in honour of the Governor, Charles de Beauharnois. The fort was in the form of an oblong "stockade of posts twelve to fifteen feet high, enclosing a few rough cabins constructed of logs and clay, and covered with bark."

In the spring of 1735 Father Mésaiger returned to Montreal on account of ill-health, and with him went La Jemmeraye and a fleet of canoes loaded with furs. La Jemmeraye described to the Governor the difficulties encountered by the explorer and urged that the King should be persuaded to provide the

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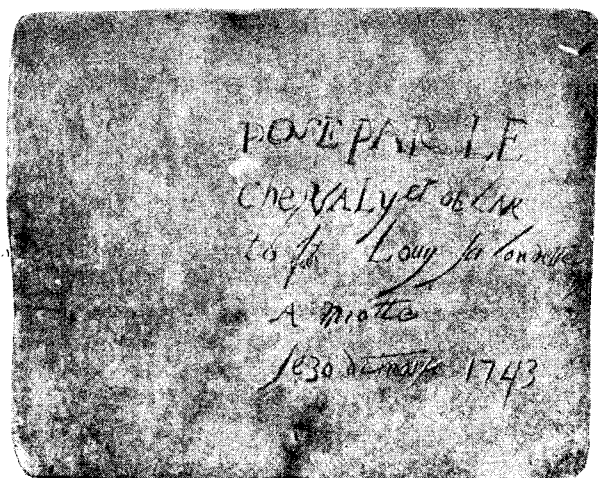
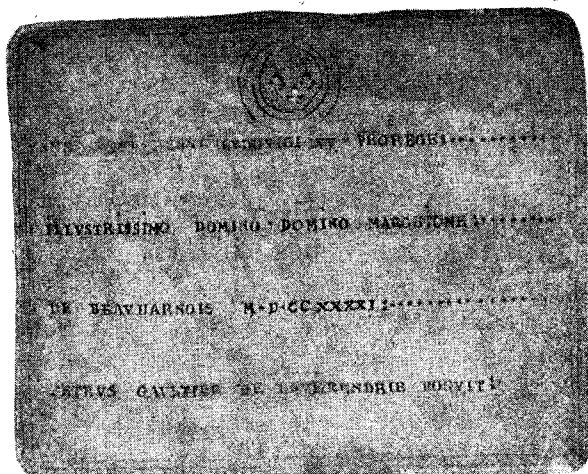
means for further explorations. The Governor was sympathetic, but his appeal to the King on La Vérendrye's behalf was without result. The Montreal "Associates" refused to advance any more supplies, and La Vérendrye was compelled to go east in order to pacify them. His eloquent description of the country between Lake Superior and Lake Winnipeg, and his promises of a rich harvest of furs, prevailed, and the merchants agreed to supply his needs. When he went west again he took with him his youngest son, Louis-Joseph, who had been left in Eastern Canada in order that he might learn how to make maps. With him there went also a young priest, Father Aulneau, to replace Father Mésaiger.

During La Vérendrye's absence in the east, his eldest son, Jean Baptiste, carrying out his father's instructions to establish a fort near the mouth of the Red River, had begun to build a fort on the Red River at the forks of the Roseau, some six miles north of the modern town of Selkirk. This fort was not completed, being superseded by Fort Maurepas, which was built later in the same year close to the mouth of the Winnipeg River.

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The year 1736 was to be a disastrous one for La Vérendrye. Misfortunes crowded upon him thick and fast. He had returned to the west full of hope. His chain of forts now reached to the Red River, and he still clung to the idea that the Western Sea was not far distant. His first disappointment was at St. Charles, where he found his men on the brink of starvation. To relieve the necessities of the garrison he was compelled to draw on the rather scanty supplies that he had brought with him. Having decided to postpone his trip to the prairies till the spring, he sent his nephew, two of his sons, and two other Frenchmen in February, 1736, to trade for furs with headquarters at Fort Maurepas. In May of that year La Jemmeraye died at the unfinished fort at Roseau, worn out with constant toil and hardship. A little older than La Vérendrye's sons, La Jemmeraye had been his uncle's right-hand man, and had shown himself both a devoted follower and a capable leader, whether the task was the building of a fort or taking charge of the transportation of furs to Montreal.

Following the death of La Jemmeraye, Fort Maurepas was temporarily abandoned.



LA VÉRENDRYE'S TABLET, SHOWING FRONT AND BACK
 FOUND BY A SCHOOL-GIRL IN 1913

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La Vérendrye remained at Fort St. Charles anxiously awaiting the supplies that were on their way from Montreal. When starvation began to threaten, he sent his eldest son, Jean Baptiste, with nineteen men, to meet the canoes carrying the goods. With the party went Father Aulneau, who was on his way to Michillimackinac. A start was made shortly after daybreak. After three or four hours' paddling, the little band landed on one of the many islands that dot the surface of the Lake of the Woods. Some of the men set to work to prepare fires and cook breakfast. Others lay around on the beach, smoking and chatting. None were armed, for there was no thought of danger. Suddenly the war-whoops of a hundred Sioux rent the air and a storm of arrows came whizzing upon the unsuspecting Frenchmen. A few were able to seize their guns, and some few savages then bit the dust, but in a few minutes all was over. The last of the Frenchmen perished in a desperate attempt to swim to another island. The scalping knife completed this tragedy of Massacre Island. For a long time no cause for this action of the Sioux could be found. Then it came out that a body of Sioux, while

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on a visit to Fort St. Charles, had been ambushed by Chippewas. When the Sioux had indignantly demanded who it was that fired upon them, the Chippewas had replied, "The French." The Sioux believed what the Chippewas told them and went off vowing vengeance. When a party of their warriors caught sight of the canoes of Jean Baptiste, they took full advantage of the opportunity in true Indian fashion.

La Vérendrye's fortunes were now at a very low ebb. He had lost his nephew, his son, his priest, and nearly half his men. He had spent all his money and was in debt to an alarming extent. The rivalry between the Indian tribes ruined the fur trade, and perpetually threatened death and destruction to La Vérendrye and his men. The great explorer made no attempt to avenge his son. The Crees and Assiniboinés saw in the murder an opportunity of getting the French to aid them against the Sioux. But La Vérendrye refused to enter upon any such struggle. His men were without powder and shot. White men and red men alike were almost destitute of provisions. So La Vérendrye persuaded his would-be allies to go hunting and collect food. Moreover, La

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Vérendrye saw that if the French were to carry on their western explorations unhampered, peace between the various Indian tribes was essential. As we have seen, a fort had been built (Fort Beauharnois) in the Sioux country for the purpose of attaching the Sioux to the French interest. Had this plan been successful, the tragedy of Massacre Island would not have occurred. La Vérendrye believed that it was a matter of the first importance to reconcile the differences that existed between the Indian tribes, and though his heart must have been heavy at his crushing loss, he refused to depart from his settled policy.

Early in 1737, La Vérendrye visited Fort Maurepas, and for the first time gazed upon the grey waters of Lake Winnipeg. His Montreal "Associates" were again becoming impatient, and for the third time La Vérendrye was compelled to go east in search of further supplies. He took with him a good haul of furs, but he had great trouble in securing further advances. In order to get the supplies necessary for his long-cherished exploration of the prairies, he was compelled to hand over his forts to

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his "Associates," and leave them in full control of the fur-trading.

Hastening westward again La Vérendrye reached Fort Maurepas in September, 1738. He at once entered Lake Winnipeg, skirted its south-east shore, and passed up the Red River to its junction with the Assiniboine, where he found ten Cree Lodges.

Few of us but have at some time or other crossed La Vérendrye's trail. No great stretch of imagination is necessary for the citizen of Winnipeg who would in fancy see the first white man to pass up the Red River. Six heavily laden canoes creep along the bank under the rhythmic paddling of their *voyageur* crews. Seated in the first canoe is the grey-haired explorer, at this time fifty-three years old. Two of his sons are with him (Pierre has been left to look after his father's interests at Fort St. Charles), and about twenty men. His keen glance searches intently on every side, for who can tell what the next bend in the river will disclose? The gaily dressed Frenchmen land. The peace-pipe is smoked with the Cree chiefs. Two days of rest and feasting follow. Then La Vérendrye pushes on again, but not before

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arranging for the erection of a fort at this important junction. His orders are carried out, and a wooden fort, known as Fort Rouge, is built on the south bank of the Assiniboine. The fort is soon abandoned, but on its site there rises in after years the great residential section of the city of Winnipeg. And the old name is retained; it is called Fort Rouge to this day.

After bidding farewell to the Cree chiefs, La Vérendrye journeyed on up the Assiniboine River. At the point where the great portage from this river to Lake Manitoba is made, he built another fort, Fort La Reine, close to where Portage la Prairie now stands. This fort straddled one of the most frequently used routes to Hudson Bay, and the explorer counted on rich gains from the trade with the tribes who came to the fort.

La Vérendrye made a very brief stay at the new fort. He had it in mind to reach the Western Sea. Back in Nipigon an Indian, called Ochakah, had drawn for him a rough map on birch-bark showing three routes to the Sea. None of these routes was of any great length. He had also learned of Mandans, a tribe who were reported to have accurate knowledge of a route. Pushing

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forward before his supplies could be exhausted, La Vérendrye left Fort La Reine in October (1738) to find the Mandans. With fifty followers, half of whom were French and half Indians, he travelled in a south-westerly direction, making slow progress because his guides insisted on calling at every village to add to their escort in case of an encounter with Sioux. Messengers were sent forward to the Mandans and a meeting-place arranged. By this time La Vérendrye had a body of six hundred Assiniboines with him. The savages observed strict discipline on the march. They arranged themselves in three columns with skirmishers in front, the old and lame in the middle, and a strong rear-guard. The warriors carried only their arms. Baggage was carried by the women, or by dogs harnessed to a rough sleigh made by crossing poles (the *travois*). The first Mandan village was reached on December 3rd. Friendly relations were at once established. The French lined up and saluted their hosts with three volleys. Speeches of good-will and friendship were exchanged between La Vérendrye and the Mandan chief. A feast was provided and for a time all was well. But the Mandans had

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no intention of feeding a hungry crowd of Assiniboinés for any length of time. They therefore reported that scouts had seen Sioux warriors on the war-path. This information was too much for the Assinibionés. They fled northward in panic. Unfortunately La Vérendrye's interpreter went with them, and the explorer could find out little from his hosts by means of signs. Almost the only thing that he could learn with any degree of certainty was, that the Mandans did not know the location of the Western Sea. He found the Mandan village interesting. The buildings were more elaborate than any he had met with before; the streets and squares were laid out regularly, and were kept remarkably neat and clean. The smooth, wide ramparts were built of lumber, strengthened with cross pieces. The whole village, which was really a fort, was surrounded by a deep and broad ditch. The care and skill shown in the construction of the defences of the village were without parallel in the explorer's experience. Although keenly interested in what he saw in the village, La Vérendrye could not but realize that he must turn back. The Mandans could not give him the information he

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sought. Leaving two men at the village to learn the Mandan language, the Frenchmen began their laborious return to Fort La Reine. For fifty-nine days they tramped over snow-covered prairies, breaking their own trail, hunting for their food, getting their own meals often in forty below zero weather, sleeping in the shelter of bluff or creek, and suffering torture from snow blindness. "I set out," says La Vérendrye in his notes, "although very ill, in the hope that I might get better on the way. It turned out otherwise as it was the bitterest season of the year. . . . It would be impossible to suffer more. It seemed that only death could deliver us from such misery. . . . I have never endured so much wretchedness in my life from illness and fatigue as in that journey. I found myself after a fortnight's rest a little restored." This extract shows the conditions which had to be endured by those heroic pioneers who opened up the Canadian West.

In 1739 La Vérendrye sent his son, François, known as the Chevalier, to visit Lakes Manitoba, Dauphin, Bourbon and Winnipegosis, and, as the outcome of these explorations, forts were built on Lake Manitoba (Fort Dauphin), on Cedar Lake where

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the Saskatchewan River enters the lake (Fort Bourbon), and on the Saskatchewan River (Fort Paskoyac, now The Pas).

Meanwhile La Vérendrye himself had to go to Montreal in 1740 to adjust financial troubles, but was back again at Fort La Reine in 1741. By this time, however, the hardships that the veteran explorer had undergone had begun to tell on him, and he was compelled to remain at Fort La Reine while his sons carried on the search for the Western Sea. The two youngest sons, François (the Chevalier), and Louis (Louis-Joseph), accordingly set out in the spring of 1742. The Chevalier is said to have been able to speak seven Indian languages fluently, while Louis was a trained map-maker; an admirable combination for the work in hand. Passing through the Mandan country, they went in search of a tribe known as the Horsemen, who were reported to hunt near the "Shining Mountains," and to trade with the Spaniards on the other side of the mountains. After much journeying hither and thither, the Frenchmen at last came upon the Horse Indians; only to find that these Indians would not supply them with guides because they feared the Snake Indians, who were, they

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said, encamped near the mountains. The Horsemen passed the Frenchmen on to the Bow Indians, who did not fear the Snakes. The chief of the Bow Indians proved himself a courteous, stately host, and a warm friendship sprang up between him and the Chevalier. The Bows were obviously in touch with the Spanish settlements, for the chief knew some Spanish words. But the proverbial ill-luck of the Vérendryes was again to the fore. A great attack on the Snakes was planned by the Bows. A rumour that the Snakes had circled the Bow warriors and were making for the Bow camp threw the whole host into headlong flight. The Frenchmen were forced to go with their hosts, and thus were deprived of all opportunity of ascending the "Shining Mountains," at whose foot these incidents had taken place. There is considerable doubt as to just what part of the western mountain range was reached by the Chevalier and his comrades; possibly it was the Big Horn range. An interesting relic of this expedition was found by a schoolgirl of Pierre, South Dakota, in 1913. It was a leaden plate, some eight inches long, with the arms of France and a Latin inscription on one side, and the names

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of the Chevalier, his brother Louis, and two *voyageurs* scratched on the other side, along with the date, March 30, 1743.

After a long string of adventures the party reached Fort La Reine safely, to the great joy of La Vérendrye, fifteen months after setting out. This little group of four Frenchmen were thus the first white men to catch sight of the Rockies.

In the fall of 1743 La Vérendrye was again compelled to go to Montreal. His "associates" complained bitterly because of the small returns that had so far come to them from the fur trade. Rival fur traders and others who had the ear of the governor, anxious to reap the harvest that La Vérendrye had sown, complained that he was not doing his duty in the matter of exploration. A new governor was persuaded to dismiss La Vérendrye from his post.

La Vérendrye's successor made no additions to the existing knowledge of the West. For years La Vérendrye strove hard to obtain permission to go West again, and to recoup himself in some measure for his heavy losses. He was for long unsuccessful in his efforts, but finally, in 1749, a reaction in his favour set in. A capable governor, De

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la Galissonnière, reported very favourably on the work done by the Vérendryes, and the old leader was rewarded by an appointment to the order of St. Louis, and by the restoration of his post as commander of the Western forts. La Vérendrye joyfully made his preparations for setting out. But the effort was too much for his wasted strength, and he died in the winter of 1749.

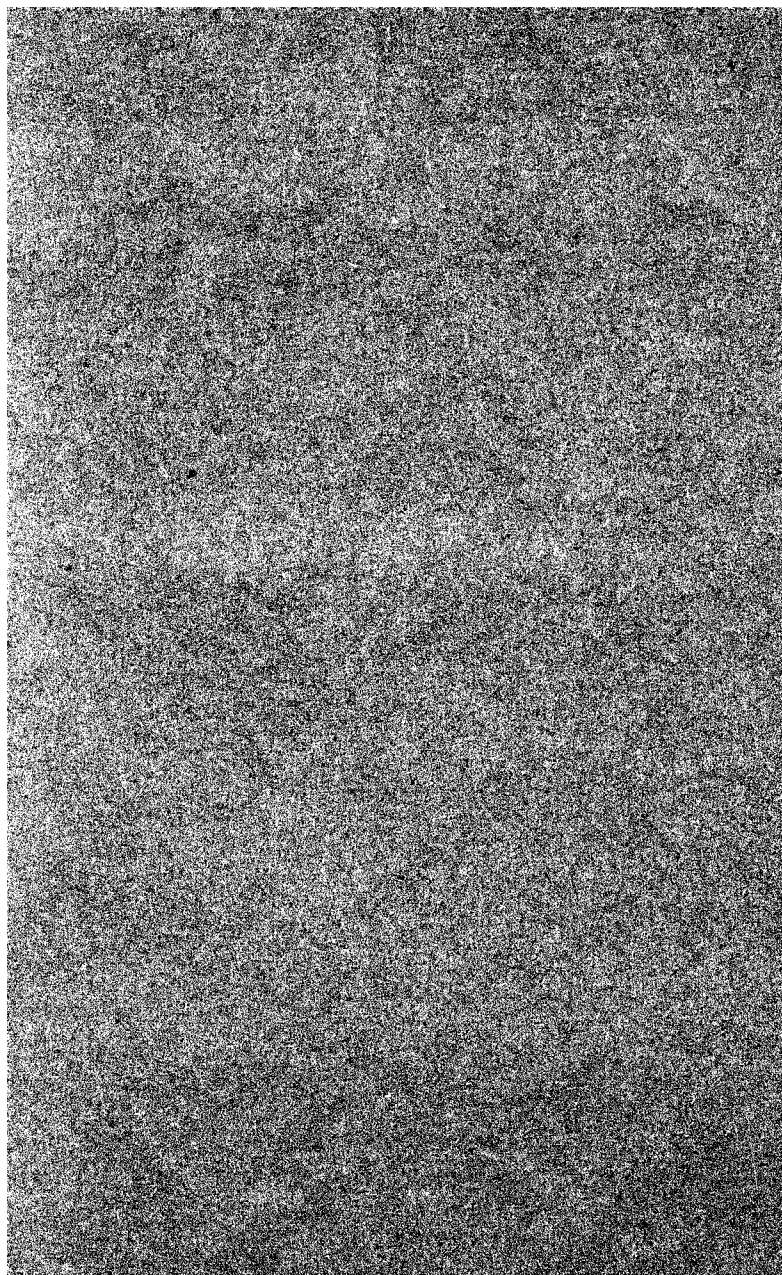
A newly arrived governor, La Jonquière, at once appointed one of his own friends to succeed La Vérendrye. Though not lacking in courage, the new commander had not La Vérendrye's patience, skill and zeal. Within a very few years all La Vérendrye's forts were abandoned, and the opening up of the West had to wait until after the British Conquest of Canada.

La Vérendrye had performed a great and memorable service for his country in bringing to light the vast prairie regions of the West. To do this he had lived a most arduous life, a life of constant toil, hardship and danger. And he had died before his time. Nor were the physical hardships of his life its worst feature. He exhausted his personal fortune in his enterprises. He became in debt to an alarming degree, owing

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43,000 francs at one period; and his life was embittered by the constant complaints of the "associates," who financed him when his own funds were gone. Throughout his life he displayed splendid qualities of patience under difficulties, of perseverance in the face of obstacles and calamities, of careful planning and wise execution, of uncomplaining steadfastness. It is a matter for deep regret that he was so ill-paid for his great services. He had sown the seed; others were to reap the harvest. He died a bankrupt. His fine sons, who had served their father and their country so loyally and so well, were involved in the general ruin. Their appeals to be allowed to go to the West in any capacity fell on deaf ears. The new commander did not want them and he was able to influence the governor. An eloquent letter from the Chevalier to the King's Secretary, recounting the services of his father and his brothers, failed to accomplish anything, and the younger Vérendryes lapsed into obscure poverty.

In spite, however, of the inglorious close of the careers of La Vérendrye and his sons, these men will live for ever in the grateful memories of all true Canadians.



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